

First Navy JJET Candidate Graduates at NATTC

Jose Buni, a young 17-year-old, proudly marched up and accepted his graduation certificate from Naval Air Technical Training Center's Aviation Machinist's Mate Course Friday, Dec. 3. What made Buni's graduation different from the 25,000 other students who will graduate from the training command this year is, his graduation is a first. Buni is the first graduate of the Navy JJET (Juvenile Justice Education and Training) Program, a partnership between NATTC and the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.

Rear Adm. David Brewer, Vice Chief of Naval Education and Training (CNET), was the special guest speaker at the ceremony and presented the graduation certificates. During his address to the gathering of students, military and civilian staff members and guests, Brewer congratulated the graduates and told them about the importance of continuing their education. He ended his remarks by reminding the audience what role the military has in guaranteeing the rights of Americans. "As Father Dennis O'Brian wrote, 'It is the soldier and not the reporter who has given us freedom of the press; it is the soldier and not the poet who has given us freedom of speech; it is the soldier and not the campus organizer who has given us the right to protest; and it is the soldier, who serves the flag, who salutes the flag and whose body and coffin are draped by that flag, who has given the protester the right to burn the flag'."

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The program is similar to a partnership between the Naval Construction Training Center, Port Hueneme, CA and the California Youth Authority. In that program, youth are trained in construction skills. In June 1999, Honor Bell, Director of the CNET Office of Community Service and Outreach, approached Captain Jaeh about the possibility of a partnership between NATTC and the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. Jaeh said he immediately saw the benefits to the community. “This is a great opportunity to set these young men’s feet back on the right path,” he said. “All our courses are college accredited, so they have that added carrot, and our Sailors and Marines have an opportunity to see our Core Values at work, helping to change lives.” Bell would like to replicate the program at other training commands around the nation.

Navy JJET provides an opportunity for selected youth offenders being housed at the Boys’ Base Facility at Corry Station to learn valuable and marketable job skills in a structured military environment, among highly motivated and successful young Navy and Marine Corps service members.

“They’re surrounded by very positive role-models rather than some of their peers who may be less than motivated,” explained Captain Ron Jaeh, Commanding Officer, NATTC. Designed to be low-impact in nature on Navy assets, Navy JJET candidates are screened first by Boys’ Base personnel, then by a panel of military members from NATTC for attitude and motivation. The candidates are given the Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test to discover the young men’s aptitude and direct their placement in one of the aviation courses at NATTC. The candidates fill vacancies in classes, so no military student is ever displaced.

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“This program is at no cost to the Navy, but benefits our community greatly,” said Jaeh. The youth are transported to and from Boys’ Base by the Juvenile Justice Department, which also pays for the youth’s lunch at the NATTC galley. Aside from the technical training, Navy JJET candidates also attend Navy Core Values classes, march to and from class with the Sailors and Marines and complete physical training with their new classmates.

The partnership between the training command and the Department of Juvenile Justice supports the Navy’s commitment to America’s Promise –The Alliance for Youth and NATTC’s commitment to the local chapter, Pensacola’s Promise – The Alliance for Youth. America’s Promise, chaired by retired General Colin Powell, marshals the combined efforts of businesses, non-profit organizations, schools, churches, government entities and everyday citizens to provide five fundamental resources to America’s youth. Pensacola’s Promise carries that same premise to the local community.

“Research conducted by the Search Institute indicates that youth need access to these five fundamental resources to grow into healthy, successful adults,” explains Joy White, Public Affairs Officer for the training command and a member of Pensacola’s Promise. The five resources include Mentoring: An ongoing relationship with a caring adult (a parent, tutor or coach); Protecting: Safe places with structured activities during non-school hours; Nurturing: A healthy start in life with access to information on living a healthy life; Preparing: Marketable skills through effective education; and Serving: An opportunity for youth to volunteer in the community and give back to Pensacola. “The Navy JJET Program provides these young men a marketable skill, and they are paired with a mentor who works with them throughout the

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program,” White said. “So we are providing two of the resources for these youth.”

Buni was nervous about being the first candidate in the program. “I want to do well here so my friends at Boys’ Base will be able to follow me,” he explained when he was first selected for the program. The course instructors and divisional officers describe Buni as a dedicated student who wants to excel, and who other students should emulate. Buni did do well, graduating with an 85.75 grade point average from the Navy’s Aviation Machinist’s Mate Course where he learned the basics of jet engine maintenance and repair. Aside from his certificate of completion for the Aviation Machinist’s Mate Course, which also carries four college credits, Buni completed his studies and successfully earned his high school GED.